

INDIGENOUS LEARNING AND TEACHING

tutors or in the Kuttab, the most important content in learning is the memorizing of the Koran as the basis of all other knowledge. The Kuttab has been, and is still in many remote villages in Aswan, the institution for religious learning, in which children learn part or the whole of the Koran, to be able to use this knowledge for their recitation and prayers, and the observation of correct ritual and prayer. The learning of reading and writing was always secondary to this all-important aim.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a great number of Kuttabs were financed by the revenue derived from charitable foundations called 'Wakfs'.¹ It was not until 1906 that these schools felt the impact of the central Government authority. In that year the Kuttab was organized, and a system of inspection and awards was worked out in accordance with which Kuttabs satisfying the official requirements could avail themselves of it. The aid was dependent upon daily instruction in the three R's, together with religious teaching, combined with a report of the Ministry of Education Inspector as to the general conditions of the Kuttab.² Later on, private awards were given to those boys who could satisfy the Inspector in an oral examination that they had learnt all the Koran by heart.

In Silwa and its neighbouring villages, there is only one aided 'Maktab', which is the official name for a recognized Kuttab, besides the other five unrecognized Kuttabs.³ It is significant to note that four out of the six Kuttabs are attached to, or situated very near, a mosque, and the fifth is adjacent, and connected with a clan's guest house. Apart from the obvious connection between the mosque and religious learning in the Kuttab, such a proximity between the Kuttab, the mosque and the clan guest house enables the Kuttab boys to fetch water from the wells of the mosque or the clan guest house to be used for drinking, or for cleaning their wooden tablets. Out of the six Sheikhs running the Kuttabs in Silwa, three are blind. The Kuttab building usually consists of two rooms, with a raised dais in each room for the Sheikh. There is hardly any equipment, except the Sheikh's prayer mat, and the wooden tablets on which the boys write their Koranic assignment. The aided Kuttab is, however, an exception, as it has wooden seats, desks, and a blackboard, and is whitewashed. All the Kuttabs, except the aided one, are confined to boys. Only recently have some girls begun to attend the aided Kuttab, as attendance at it exempts both boys and girls from going to the compulsory school. In fact, throughout the history of Moslem Egypt the keenness on teaching girls the Koran has never been so strong as in the case of boys. MacDonald mentioned, however, that there are records of

¹ J. Hayworth-Dunne, *An Introduction to the History of Education in Modern Egypt*.

² Ministry of Education, *Code of Regulations Relating to Grants-in-Aid to Kuttabs*, No. 1161, May 1906.

³ The Kuttab is usually referred to in Silwa by the name Khalwa—a word which literally means 'an isolated place for worship'.

Chapter Eleven

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE

871) **A**FTER reviewing the indigenous aims and methods of learning and teaching, we turn now to the modern system of schooling which has affected the village as a result of the national educational policy. This type of schooling is represented in the two schools of the village, the compulsory and the primary school.

872) 658 The compulsory school was established by the Provincial Council in 1925. In discussing the village compulsory school one must inevitably touch on educational problems at the national level. Compulsory schools were established to meet the long-felt need for mass literacy. The 'Egyptian Constitution' promulgated in 1923, declared in Article 19 that elementary education should be free and compulsory for all boys and girls. Accordingly the Ministry of Education planned to put this article into effect. The Ministry's scheme rejected the Kuttab as completely inadequate to cope with the problems of illiteracy, and of no educational value. Hence, new schools, called 'compulsory schools', had to be established. The period of compulsory education was to be for five years (from seven to twelve years old) on a half-day basis. The object of this programme was to benefit the maximum number of boys and girls. The time limit for completing the programme of compulsory education by providing a place for every child and thus abolishing illiteracy was fixed as fifteen years, and was extended later to twenty years.¹ The scheme was based on the participation of the Provincial Councils with the Ministry of Education, the former to be responsible for the sites, buildings, furniture and equipment; the latter for the staffing and administration. In 1933, owing to the difficulties entailed in the previous programme, a new education bill was passed to enforce attendance between the ages of seven and twelve, thus reducing the period to five years instead of six, and still on the half-day basis. Only those who suffer from physical or mental diseases, or those who live more than two kilometres from the nearest school, are exempt. The law also stipulates that the child's parents or guardians are responsible for his education in a compulsory school, if he is not receiving education else-

¹ Al-Kabbani, *Sa'at al-T'alin fi Misr*, Cairo, 1945, pp. 9-10 (Arabic).

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where. In default of compliance or in the case of the continued absence of the child, its parents or guardian are to be notified, and are liable to fine or imprisonment. 812
[558]

These were the main laws governing the compulsory school in Egypt until 1948, and the village school was on a half-day basis up to that year, boys attending school in the morning, followed by the girls in the afternoon.¹ There are usually four classes in the school building and three other rooms, one for the staff and two for stores. The number of school-children during the year 1950-51 was 138 in the four classes. According to the official records the numbers of children of the compulsory school age for the last seven years were: [346]

TABLE VI

Children of the compulsory school age
in Silwa (1944-51) [162]

Year	Total	Boys	Girls
1944	154	77	87
1945	98	50	48
1946	98	45	53
1947	97	48	49
1948	131	60	71
1949	47	26	21
1950	61	38	23
1951	77	51	26 ⁽¹⁾

The school, however, has only places for 150 children of all ages, and thus there is scope for some parents to compete for appeal either to the Omda or the headmaster at the beginning of the year to exempt their children from schooling or to withdraw them on grounds of lack of space.

As to the staff, the school has between three and four teachers; two of them at present are from the village itself, and the teachers are either the products of al-Azhar, the theological University, or the Elementary Training College (four to five years' course). The main requirement for entrance to the latter at the age of fourteen is the memorization of half 815
[874]

¹ It is indicative of the male-female ethos that boys should attend school first, and even at present when the school is full, and the classes are mixed, the boys sit in the front, with the girls at the back of the class. This reflects the different sex norm guiding the behaviour of the villagers in comparison with mixed education in the modern Egyptian Universities where, for instance, girl students sit in the front and the male students sit behind them, yet there is no real mixing in the lecture rooms. The front rows are normally reserved for girls, and the general tendency is for the girls to keep to these rows. [562]

² The number of children eligible for compulsory school in 1949, 1950 and 1951 is comparatively low because of the very high death rate amongst both children and adults between 1941 and 1943 as a result of the malaria epidemic. [165]
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892 such a high prestige as they lead to the coveted government posts. In fact, a child leaving the compulsory school at the age of twelve cannot proceed to a secondary school education, except through the primary school, which he is now too old to enter. It must be pointed out here that the primary school leading to secondary and higher education has been a different type of school from the elementary school. In this way, the elementary school population has been debarred from any further educational facilities, except the elementary Teacher Training Schools and al-Azhar. This handicap of the compulsory school has stimulated the idea of unifying the first stage of education for all children of six to twelve years of age, as is the case in other democratic countries. The Elementary Education Act, passed by the Parliament in 1948, was the crowning effort of the previous attempt to bring the primary and elementary schools together. In theory, at least, the curriculum and the equipment at the elementary school are to be brought up to the level of the primary school, with the exception of keeping a foreign language in the third and fourth years of the primary school. In addition to that, the half-day system is to be abolished, and the elementary course is to extend to six years on a full-day basis from six to twelve.¹

The compulsory school in Silwa has not felt the impact of the new changes except in the name, being called the converted primary school: it has remained the same both in building, equipment and content of education, as well as the period of schooling from seven to twelve, and no children have been transferred from the primary school, as they have never reached the standards required.

Unattracted by the compulsory school, the villagers have been clamouring for a primary school, the desire for which has been motivated by practical purposes. In spite of the Elementary Education Act of 1948, the primary school is, in the villagers' view, the only way leading to government jobs, and thus for wealth and prestige. It happened that during the early days of my stay in the village (December 1950), the Minister of Education in Egypt appealed to the rich to contribute liberally in money or in premises for educational purposes. On this occasion the member of the Upper House for Silwa was persuaded by the villagers to build the school and offer it to the Minister. The site was chosen, and the building was just beginning when the writer left the village in April 1951. The new primary school has actually been functioning since October of the same year. The school takes children from the age of seven to twelve on the basis of an entrance examination in reading, writing, arithmetic and

¹ Ministry of Education Report, 1947-8, pp. 3-4 (in Arabic), Government Press, Cairo, 1948. New laws have been recently enacted (May-June 1953) for the reorganization of the educational system in Egypt. The struggle for the unified school is being won. The system is divided into three stages: 1. primary (6-10); 2. preparatory (10-12); 3. secondary (12-16). Curricula for the various stages are under review for their adaptation to the needs of the learners.